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PLAN FOR ORGANIZING THE ENTRANTS INTO THE HIGH SCHOOL OF COMMERCE ACCORDING TO THEIR ATTAINMENTS IN SCHOLAR- SHIP, THEIR CAPACITIES, AND THEIR AIMS

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For a number of years the teachers in the High School of Commerce have been conscious that the method which we were using in grouping students who enter the high school was defective in many respects. In accordance with common practices, we were grouping our entering students into uniform sections upon the basis of the foreign language indicated in their application blanks. All boys, once this choice of language was recorded, were subjected to the same treatment; they all took up the same topics in practically the same way. They were given the same examinations and were marked by the same scale.

What was the result?

The progress of the brighter boys was retarded, and the slower boys fell behind in the race. In consequence, before the first term was over, many of the slower boys gave up in discouragement, and the brighter boys, having learned that the school did not engage all of their intellectual energies, were developing habits of idleness and poor work.

In view of these conditions, in the spring of 1918 we resolved to try an experiment. We disregarded the stated choice of all applicants for admission and put all boys who entered the school into uniform reservoir classes for a period of three weeks. These classes were organized as far as possible upon a neighbor-

hood basis. Boys from the same elementary school were grouped together in one class. This classification proved most satisfactory from the boy's standpoint because it placed him in a group with other boys with whom he was acquainted. Old associations and elementary-school traditions were brought into the high school. Old habits were not torn up by the roots. From the teacher's point of view, also, the arrangement was an improvement. We were able to understand the mental habits of the pupils more easily and to shape our work to fit in with things which the boys had already learned.

Identical programs were prepared for all of these classes. For three weeks the boys met the teachers of English, mathematics, foreign languages, social science, and commercial branches, and tests both for information and for intelligence were carefully applied.

In English a carefully planned review was put into operation. Each individual pupil was under observation with a view to rating him according to his accomplishments. But the tests were not administered to the exclusion of teaching. The boys were not conscious that they were under observation. As far as they could see they were being handled in exactly the same way as the boys in the upper grades.

The rating in English was a combination of marks in four different subjects: (1) oral composition, (2) letter-writing, (3) reading, (4) grammatical usage and punctuation. Each pupil gave one or more original one-minute talks, wrote three letters, and was subjected to a specially designed two-minute reading test to determine ability in pronunciation and to discover defective phonation. At the same time three uniform written tests were conducted covering such points in grammatical usage as the agreement of verb with subject, the correct discrimination between adjective and adverb, the use of single and not double negatives, and the proper use of verb forms such as "did" and "saw," "done" and "seen." In

punctuation the tests covered the use of the period, the interrogation point, the comma, the apostrophe, and other common punctuation marks.

Boys whose grades thus determined averaged 75 per cent or better for the three weeks of observation were put into rapid advancement classes in English. Three such classes, averaging 37 each, were formed. These classes will be expected to cover two terms' work in one term.

Boys with defective phonation as evidenced by stammering, stuttering, lisping, etc., were segregated. Sixty-two such cases were found and formed into two classes for special treatment. None of these will be allowed to take up the study of a foreign language until the fault has been cured.

Some thirty or forty other pupils who attained a low standing in English and mathematics were also excluded from the study of a foreign language for the present, so that they might be able to devote more attention to improving these fundamentals.

A summary of the results in English as reported for 783 boys at the end of three weeks shows:

1 boy	with over 90 per cent;	8 boys	with over 85 per cent
57 boys	" " 80 " "	122	" " " 75 " "
217	" " " 70 " "	534	" " " 60 " "

At the other end we find 249 boys who could not make 60 per cent, and 90 of these could not reach 40 per cent.

A similar course was followed in mathematics. During the observation period ten uniform reviews or tests in arithmetic in the form of 70 different problems were informally administered. The topics covered included the four operations in integers, decimals, business fractions, and simple problems in percentage and interest. The grade of the work was what would be required for graduation from an elementary school.

Those who attained an average of 75 per cent for the three weeks were permitted to drop the first-term work in arithmetic

and were put immediately into classes in commercial algebra which the others will take up in their second term. Those who made between 70 per cent and 75 per cent and who also stood well in the other subjects were also advanced to commercial algebra. Altogether, six such classes, averaging 40 each, were formed.

A summary of the results in mathematics as reported for 783 boys at the end of three weeks shows:

14 boys with over 90 per cent						41 boys with over 85 per cent							
101	"	"	"	80	"	"	167	"	"	"	75	"	"
293	"	"	"	70	"	"	495	"	"	"	60	"	"

At the other end we find 288 boys below 60 per cent, and 67 of these unable to make 40 per cent.

The tests for language ability presented a special problem. Not only was the attempt made to determine whether a pupil could reasonably hope to succeed in the study of a foreign language, but each pupil properly qualified was guided and helped to make an intelligent choice. Prejudice and hastily made decisions had to be combated. Those not qualified had to be convinced that it was to their advantage to postpone the study for the time being. The applicant for entrance into the high school came to us this time with his choice made. He was disposed to persist in that choice.

By actual count we found that of the 872 applicants who indicated a choice on June 28, 1918, 646, or 74 per cent, elected Spanish, 185, or 21 per cent, elected French, and only 41, or 5 per cent, were content to study no foreign language.

The extent of the change accomplished may be appreciated by a comparison of these figures with what we found when the observation period was over on October 7, 1918. Of the 790 pupils in actual attendance, 369, or 47 per cent, were studying Spanish, 151, or 19 per cent, were studying French, and 270, or 34 per cent, were taking no foreign language at all.

To obtain these results the language teachers spent part of their three periods a week during the observation period in discussing the advantages and the advisability of studying this or that or any foreign language, and the wisdom of deferring the study to a later period. Parts of English grammar which would prove helpful in the study of any foreign language were reviewed and comparisons made.

During this period also the language teachers conducted a series of aptitude tests. These tests, three in number, were devised by Dr. Briggs and Dr. Kelley of Teachers College, and were intended to discover the extent of a pupil's aptitude for studying a foreign language. The value of these tests will be ascertained by the records of the pupils. We have at least entered upon a period in which we shall make an effort to determine scientifically as well as empirically which students are prepared to take up the study of a foreign language in the secondary schools.

As a result of these tests and the other classroom work and discussions, the language teachers were enabled to recommend the grouping given above.

The number of pupils who were dissatisfied because they were excluded from the study of a foreign language for one reason or another was negligible. It amounted to scarcely 5 per cent of the total number of boys who were placed.

The net results of the experiment are as follows. Of the twenty first-term classes, nine were given Spanish as a foreign language, four were given French, and seven were given no foreign language at all. There were two classes doing advanced work in English, two doing special work to correct defects in phonation, six doing advanced work in mathematics, and two doing advanced work in bookkeeping. In other words, we have succeeded in classifying our students to some extent upon the basis of their abilities and their attainments. The brighter boys are grouped in special classes and are being stimulated

instead of retarded; the duller boys are placed in groups in which they are being given work commensurate with their ability instead of being held to standards to which they never could attain. The choice of language has been made with some degree of intelligence; it has not been left altogether to chance.

It is, of course, too early to attempt to evaluate the results of the experiments. This group of some 750 or 800 boys will be watched with a view to determining the effect of this classification. We shall undoubtedly find weak spots in our new organization. We recognize the need for further study of the problem; we already see possibilities of carrying the system of classification farther; but we are already certain that the new system which we have just inaugurated is better than any method of classifying entering students which we used in the past.